

# Stances and Substances

By JOHN R. SEELEY

ABSTRACT: Three of the most talked-of problems in the Western world, and especially America, today are hair, drugs, and the Vietnamese War, and all of them center around the young. The young are seemingly America's first preoccupation, and they have brought these matters to the forefront of our concerns. In all three, they have threatened the traditional culture by their adoption of the attitudes of opposition. By their actions they are expressing deeply held convictions so opposed to the accepted mores and the status quo that parents, teachers, and governments are being challenged to review their own stances or accept the disquieting, chilling, or sometimes horrifying results. The responsibility for all these actions on the part of the young is laid at the door of the control structure that is the cause of the civilizational crisis with which the Western nations are faced. A laborious course of social reconstruction, led by men of wisdom and inspiration, is probably the only way to the survival of our culture.

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I HAVE not made a proper scientific count of column inches printed and man-seconds of speech and listening, but my impression is that, in the circles in which I move and in which those in those circles move, three topics have in the last six years been given the greatest total word-volume as well as word-passion: Hair, Drugs, and the War. And in that order.

Around these and related topics we are close to an undeclared psycho-social civil war, instituted, escalated, re-escalated and finally allowed to get utterly, or all but, out of hand. This war goes on over nearly the whole Western world, though here, as usual, America leads the way.

All three topics often proceed from and play back into discussions of "the Young." The Young are seemingly America's Number One love, Number One enemy, Number One public problem, and Number One private preoccupation. Locked in a love/hate relation to them, severally and collectively, those not young do more for them on a basis they take to be one of love and concern, while they also mount more weaponry and defeat-and-control gadgetry, material, social, and psychological against them, define them more into object-status as a problem, and "worry" more about them, than any other category of the population: women, blacks, browns, reds, or yellows, the old, the poor, the sick, the lonely, the criminal, even the unholy and deadly dangerous industrial-military-academic alliance.

#### THE YOUNG AND THEIR HAIR

First, as to hair: when young men reject the standard and hallmark and badge of conventionally defined virility, the clean-shaven (note the odd connection of terms!) face and the close-cut (at its extreme, erectile) hair, and embrace a carefully culti-

vated, artistically elaborated sculpture of facial hirsute adornment, and a long, soft, flowing, sensual, and equally careful arrangement of head-hair, they are certainly saying something profound and threatening to those bearers of the traditional culture who say otherwise. They are saying, in an expressive gesture more powerful than any manifesto, all of the following things, among others: that artistic effect is more important to them than "efficient" appearance; that natural signs of sexuality and heightened sexual consciousness should not be restrained from the overt and public life and restricted to the covert and private one; that the over-emphasis on categories like man/woman, public/private, active/passive, wooer/wooded, and the fixed labels and allotted roles connected therewith, are to be blurred and collapsed so that a finer sensibility for person and situation can replace labelling and label-reading; that sensuality, sexuality, play, and drama are not to be segregated from but infused into daily life; that personal style and taste must over-ride the economies and conveniences of ready reading and identification; that hard, aggressive, determined, effortful pushiness, expressed in appearance, has not only nothing to do with what it is to be a man, but is a caricature, distortion, and miserable reduction of what that is.

At a deeper level, the transformation marks and expresses, in achievement and intent, the rejection of a whole phallic way of appearing and being in the world, in favor of a way that is at once more genital and more polymorph-perverse.

Such a shift presupposes a gradual shift in the center of gravity of a civilization, if not a new civilization—always provided we survive at all.

Let me, therefore, touch briefly on the war and then get down to drugs—or, perhaps, up!

## THE YOUNG AND THE WAR

The resistance to the war moves at many levels, but in its symbolic meaning and in its intertwining with other issues it is unlike, greatly unlike, earlier forms of resistance to a draft or a particular war. For in some very large part this resistance carries and is carried by two deeper flows. They are closely related. The first flow is in a general movement against categorization, organization, role, obedience, and so on. The second flow is against the pre-existing notions of manhood and manliness, the values put upon assertive, aggressive, and proving and testing behavior for the person, and determining, ruling, controlling, expansive, conquistadorial behavior for the nation or the state. It is not simply that the new people think this war foolish to the point of insanity and immoral to the point of bottomless depravity, but that they believe the whole conscience and consciousness out of which it flows is the source of a death-dealing disease for them, for us, for all mankind. When they say, at their mildest, that they "can't relate to it," they mean something far more significant than that they oppose it. They mean that, given their conscience and consciousness, they cannot comprehend it, and others cannot comprehend their incomprehension—that the very terms of the language that leads to this and all such enterprises are terms that have no meaning for them, or as little as "succubi" or "incubi" have (though one sometimes wonders) for the calculators and computers or for the games-theorists and power-balancers and games-players in the Pentagon. And by "all such enterprises," they mean not only all aggressive wars but the whole mindless conquest of everything that there is to be conquered—at the cost of eviscerating well-nigh every other human capacity—

which is the essence and arch-enterprise of the civilization itself. They do not even want all that much to conquer disease, if the price of conquest is just that much more calculation, control, regulation, bureaucracy, hassling, and extension of technarchy over all.

## THE YOUNG AND DRUGS

It is time to turn to the drug problem, though the very use of the words "drug problem" prejudices and prejudices adequate apprehension of what is afoot. What is one man's "drug problem" is another man's "narc problem," and the right to name what a problem is is a pure expression of relative power. Moreover, the tendency to define almost everything as a problem is itself an expression of a particular form of consciousness, a certain way of being in the world, that is not given in nature but constructed in culture and, therefore, open to question, and now questioned. But since I cannot, I presume, hope to convince anyone on simple presentation that problem-constituting may be at or near the heart of a great part of our difficulties in every sphere, let me attempt to discuss the matter in the terms assigned.

Unfortunately, we must begin with some very elementary matters.

What is a drug?

As soon as we define the term we may well be into the heart of the controversy and those much deeper matters it opens up. The word "drug" is old, but, interestingly, its etymological origin is lost in antiquity. A brief dictionary definition is "a medicinal substance." But what does "medicinal" mean? Medicinal means "pertaining to medicine." Medicine is the art of preserving or restoring health. Health means "wholeness." And wholeness is not only etymologically the twin of holiness, but, in a long tradition, either identical in meaning or so related that holiness in-

cludes wholeness. The holy is what is conformed to the divine. The divine is what is of surpassing excellence. Put it together: a drug is a substance requisite or helpful to an art that preserves, restores, or enhances surpassing excellence. I am not sure that, for a believer, the communion wafer, though simple bread in a secular apprehension, does not qualify as a drug in a sacred one.

I must assume that the reader is thinking that this is not what he means. And it is certainly not what any arm of government concerned with "dangerous drugs" thinks *it* means. It, too, might allow or insist that a drug is a medicinal substance. A medicinal substance, they would hold, however, is a substance that is or ought to be used exclusively in medicine. "Medicine" to them is an applied science. It is an applied science properly practiced only by physicians. Physicians are one class of state licensees. These licensees preserve or restore health. Health is adequate somatic or psychological (or, perhaps, psychosomatic) function. Adequate function is a notion definable in science, and its presence or absence is ascertainable by scientific enquiry. "Scientific" means essentially experimental. Table salt, if anyone were tempted to take it in fatal doses, would doubtless qualify as a drug, if physicians so declared, as glue perhaps does already.

### *The Polar Extremes*

The drug problem in its modern form cannot be understood without recognition and deep appreciation of its two contending polar extremes as sketched, though much of what is problematic lies in what I would call the "muddled middle." The muddled middle is itself largely, however, the result of confusion engendered by the mutual failure of those at the purer poles to understand one another. Unless the two sides—the conventional side being clearly the

aggressor—drive each other to insane excess, we are pushed neither to the madresses of obsessive prohibition nor to the insanities of hysterical abandon.

It is no accident and no isolated phenomenon that the issues do appear framed on those terms: prohibition or abandonment; or, to put it more generally, conformity to peremptory demand based on the conventional wisdom, or exile—psychosocial or physical, or both.

The same alternatives, broadly, are commonly offered in the matter of male hair length, in other matters of costume, style, consumption, manners, or attire for both sexes, in male attitudes to and action about war and, often, female attitudes and actions in the realm of sex. At least, the alternatives offered are so perceived by the thousands of runaways or internal exiles of our society, becoming more numerous and younger each year. And if it is not the message consciously intended by thousands of parents, schools, and communities, it must be either the unconscious message communicated or a misunderstanding so massive that it taxes credulity to believe that the explanation lies in a "communications gap" in the usual sense. If there is a "communications gap" that is relevant, it lies more probably within the people than between them, most especially in the disjuncture between the conscious and unconscious wishes of parents and "parent-figures." It is such intrapersonal communications gaps that underlie interpersonal ones. A sense of fatherlessness, of having been unfathered or defathered, is the commonest report or complaint I have encountered in extended intimate conversation with those young most dangerously into and most in the muddled middle of the drug pattern. In those previously weak or badly damaged, this results in a sort of protracted or passive floating, chemically or otherwise induced or sustained.

In the stronger, it results in more or less effective, more or less sad, attempts to father and mother themselves or each other anew, to be reborn, or, more commonly, to seek an unsatisfactory but next-best solution in substituting would-be responsible siblingship as a source of birth, nurture, sustenance, and support in place of effective parenting.

It would be wrong to let the impression lie that those setting such polar alternatives for their progeny or quasi-progeny do so simply wickedly, wantonly, or without agony and yearning for something other and better. What happens is more like—and probably an enlargement of—what happens in any time of religious transformation, such as the Reformation or, more markedly, the advent of Christianity or Islam. “Believers” and “unbelievers,” especially perhaps the best of both, are simply unable to understand each other on almost any point or at almost any level; indeed, each can hardly believe either that the other believes what he says he believes, or that, if he does, he can be in any intelligible sense sane. Imagine Jesus trying to explain to the Roman High Command the doctrines of “love your enemies,” “unto him that smiteth thee on one cheek, offer also the other,” and “take no thought for the morrow”—not as strategic tricks or means to something else, but as samples of what is implied by the only proper way of being in the world!

I have, of course, up to this point drawn my prototypes too pure, though real people close to that degree of purity in their counterposed perceptions do exist. Most of the protagonists more muddily perceive the issue from points near one or the other pole. If we want to take in considerable numbers—still omitting a substantial middle—we should have to say that not a religion, but a religious movement or milling, or

a movement or milling with marked religious overtones, confronts, over drugs, a debased physicianship backed by a debased secular power, the state. Something not yet fully formed confronts two somethings, long-formed and gone, past prime and seed-time, toward degeneration.

### *The Degenerate State*

I will not argue in detail here, taking it to be obvious, that the state is degenerate. Its long-established monopoly of violence is now nearly matched by its monopoly of atrocity and major crime. No enterprise smaller than the state can effectively engage in genocide, biocide, and the noöcide that we call national propaganda, as the core of communication at home and abroad. Nor can any other enterprise match the state *in hubris* as reflected in its galloping drift to totalism: the very volume of statute law and regulation, and the logarithmic rate at which it increases, even as it invades every manner and matter of being and behaving, sufficiently attest a cancerous character.

Hardly conscious any longer that men are more than citizens and subjects, that acts have many meanings and percussions and repercussions on many levels, the state (barely restrained in this country by the remnants and tatters of the Constitution) moves to rule and regulate more and more, in more and more detail, in more and more respects.

### *Medicine as an Art*

The state is degenerate by bloating.

And medicine is degenerate both by its dependence on the state and by shrinkage due to the same cultural imperatives that make the state so bloated. The state can properly neither affirm nor deny professional proficiency, nor does such proficiency require the state's confirmation—always provided

that there is a profession there to recognize the adept and withhold recognition from the apprentice or quack. But more serious than the profession's dependence on the state for "licensing," money and enforcement action, is its own shrinkage increasingly toward the ideal of "scientific medicine." Science, like love, is not enough! A profession whose responsibility is health or wholeness must practice a general art—the healing art, the art of aiding men become or remain whole—and science is of that art neither the basis nor the crown.

A "physician" means a "man who physics," who practices, it is assumed, in the physical order—so much so that a special word, "psychosomatic," had to be coined to patch the order, as though any medicine applied to man (or, probably, to anything living) could be other than psychosomatic or somatopsychic. Nothing can be done to or for a body that is not done to or for, or often against, a psyche—nor, for that matter, to the indivisible psychesoma or person, that is not done to or for or against the society, actual and virtual, in which he exists. A "doctor," the better term, means a "teacher," someone who causes someone to learn what that person needs to learn, that is, to grow or otherwise become more nearly whole.

In general, far from being such doctors, most physicians are ultra-competent engineer-managers, not even of whole bodies but of organs or organ-systems, or masters of mere procedures such as cutting or photography and photograph-reading. Were there real doctors, they would be, like good parents or teachers, those to whom persons would turn in warranted trust, to be told and shown by advice, practice, and example what was good for each, at a given moment in his expanding life, at a given instant in man's history and

evolution. What would be good might be a drug, or a word, or a silence. Which would be good would be a matter for the art. The art would depend on a relation. And the relation could not have as one party a customer or an object of a technology or material for a craft.

### *Becoming Their Own Doctors*

Failing such doctors, many have tried to become their own doctors or to engage with others in an amateur practice of the kind called for. It is probably about as silly for any man to be his own doctor as to be his own lawyer, teacher, or priest. It may even be a contradiction in terms. Yet a great part of the "drug problem" lies precisely in this: people, perhaps especially young people, take drugs—and do other things—acting validly on the aim of "expanding" their "consciousness" out of the consequent experience. They may well act imprudently as their own doctors, just as they may also unwisely attempt, in their desperate necessity, to be their own teachers and parents. That they will know what will best, or appropriately, or at all, expand their consciousness at any given moment is, I believe, almost by definition impossible. If they did know, it would argue that they had already achieved enough "expansion of consciousness" to know themselves and the moment and the context and the means so well that they knew beforehand what was most needed next.

That is unlikely. Most unlikely.

But, as the majority find themselves situated, as they look for alternative means to the valid end, they look one way to amateurs who have in a perhaps rather vague way the right ends in view, and the other way to certified practitioners who have not only the wrong ones, but a consciousness so constricted that they do not know (or, if



they “know,” only cognitively so) that they are wrong. Suppose both were to view with favor the ingestion of the same substance in the same dosage, say a “mood-elevator.” The rankest amateur would know that a great part, perhaps the essence, of the effect would depend not on bare chemical properties, but upon who gave it to whom, with what message in words—and beyond or below words—and in whose company it was taken, in what surroundings, with what supported expectations, in what state of mind, open to what inner and outer clues and messages, at how many levels of consciousness. The scientific physician will generally, in the face of such knowledge, simply write an authoritative prescription, to be delivered to another commercial functionary, who will “make up” and dispense some pills, put them into a plastic bottle with a typed and printed instructional and restrictive label. The pills so dispensed will probably be taken privately, if not secretly or furtively, perhaps gulped down, with no more special or appropriately directed awareness than is allowed for all other functions of life from which we thus normally also cut ourselves off.

This is the major underlying, very nearly ultimate, postural counterposition that makes nearly all talk about the drug problem merely fill the air with soundwaves, or conceal in seeming contention a conflict or difference whose terms never come clear.

### *The Muddled Middle*

In the middle—what I have called the muddled middle—exist a still more luckless number who take their major terms of reference from neither party or perhaps, in still more degenerate terms, from both. These are they who, roughly, having been abandoned, bereft of significant parents, teachers, doctors, gurus, have abandoned themselves, and who, in their misery, seek mere relief

or, in their boredom, mere kicks. Perhaps the fact that they seek even these indicates that they have not totally abandoned themselves, even as, perhaps, they have not been totally abandoned.

They take their terms from the technologist-physicians in that, without any appreciable feel for or sense of themselves or the world, they seek simply to impose on their minds and bodies—treated virtually as alien objects outside which they, like the physicians, stand—other states (often *any* other state) by almost any means, mechanically viewed and mechanically used. They take their terms from the quasi- or proto-religious or mystical, insofar as they seek to break out of the straitjacket of present consciousness toward some unknown which they sense must be better, insofar as they attempt to decondition themselves at any price—sickness or death, if necessary—to find some freedom, some new perspective if not some new vision.

They also derive their terms from neither party, insofar as they forsake all the prudential considerations represented by physicians, and at the same time mistake the pursuit of momentary pleasures for the search for bliss represented by the quasi- and proto-mystics. The result is catastrophic fragmentation of persons never too well put together, anyway. It is exhibited in quantitatively thinned and qualitatively impoverished social relations, kicks—literally self-assaults—in place of joy at least glimpsed and moved toward, and unwanted and pointless sicknesses and hungers of body and soul. These interact in a dialectic of destruction that is a model of devolution of person and world.

I do not doubt that the number of available drugs is going to increase till we possess and have widespread knowledge about substances possibly helpful in inducing or sustaining or altering or

eliminating almost any state of the body/mind. The drug manufacturers, on one side, proceed apace in permuting and combining almost all possible chemical substances; and the amateurs, on their side, search as well nature's herbarium, tribal practice and lore, the mushrooms and barks and shoots and leaves and flowers that properly treated—physically and ceremonially—yield or might yield this or that catalyst or foundation for this or that transformation, momentary or enduring.

No one will deny that these are powerful agents and reagents. No one will deny that power is dangerous, and promising, and that, either way, it beckons. The vision of such substances let loose at random chills every imagination. And since what we see as preview is sufficient horror (though also hope), all stand in the status of sorcerer's apprentices—as we stand before so much else—wondering what to do with the powers we have, unprepared for them, let loose.

### *Drugs, Crime, and War*

The power of the substances, evidently, even at this early stage, is sufficient to organize a whole criminal industry, and force a large segment of society into crime both in its employment of the drugs—crime merely by definition—and in the activities necessary to procure the drugs at prohibition-engendered, fantastic prices. By the same token, as already indicated, a vast symbiotic control, cure, propaganda, and punishment industry, with a budget likely soon to rival the military one, has been built up; a snoop and spy system, developed and spread wide and deep; dogs forced into detection and your friendly policeman into dawn raids and no-knock warrants; the courts clogged; humane judges violated in their consciences; trust relations between par-

ents and children, teachers and pupils, and even friends and peers, infected with mutual suspicion. All this and more has been rapidly brought into being and launched on a course of unlimited growth. But the same materials, on the other side, have originated a whole new culture, new perceptions, new sensitivities between persons and sensibilities within them, a vast opening toward those intimations for the lack of acquaintance with which Western culture and civilization appear to be suffocating and dying in the excesses of their own unreasonable worship and service of an irrational "rationality," that is, a consciousness narrowed almost to mere calculation, cast always in means/ends terms that terminate in no reasonably desirable or mutually related ends.

What is being played out around, or focused upon, the "drug problem"—as with the other problems mentioned and, indeed, now, nearly all problems—is the civilizational crisis itself. Someone, at a conference I recently attended, spoke of Western man's "rational fatigue." But more than fatigue, more than subjective exhaustion, is at stake. Rationality, defined as it has been since Descartes, has run itself out, and the persons and the society which deified it are in moral peril if not in their terminal sickness or death throes.

The concentration camps, the international balance of terror, Herman Kahn's unthinkable thinking of the unthinkable, free-fire zones and biocide, the thousand and one My Lais that are not incidents in but are the essence of the Vietnam War, and the Vietnams more surely than tomorrow yet to come—all these and their like are not aberrations from but perfect expressions of the mentality of rationalism which, originating in modern times in the West, bids fair now to engulf and sink the world. And at the level personally apprehended, the growing emptiness, alienation, anxiety



or apathy, goal-fragmentation or goallessness, impersonalization and depersonalization, disenchantment and disillusionment, despair or, beyond despair, anesthesia, speak for the same phenomenon.

*The Civilizational Crisis*

I do not think we can cope with or cure the drug problem in the small or in the large—indeed, I do not think we can do other than make very bad matters very much worse—unless we are ready, first, to recognize the civilizational crisis, and then do or let others do something sufficient about it. The more we attempt to exert control over drug use or abuse—both responses, most generally, to control gone insane in the culture—the more we add to the control structure that is itself the essential cause of the essential problem. Our very way of framing the problem, and indeed the perceptions and misperceptions of man and life that permit us to frame it that way—even before we “respond”—so offend the sensibilities that are sought in and sometimes seemingly furthered by at least some drugs, that we have with the users no common universe of discourse. We have no way so to enter their lives that we might know better forms to enhance them than the ones they, perhaps too cavalierly and casually, employ. If we add, or permit our official agents to add, the crimes of spying and lying to the sin of being uncomprehending and the fault of being incomprehensible, we must expect at best to be ignored as irrelevant and at worst to be viewed and treated as enemy.

I do not doubt for a moment—nor do most of those I know who have stayed close enough to the phenomena to be credible witnesses—that many have passed by means of drugs (in many cases, later, dropped) to states of awareness, to insights, to modalities of being,

to apparent conversions, which one must conclude could have been reached by them in no other way. These transformations seem to me, on my best intuition, all-important steps in the several developments of those who have undergone them and, potentially, in the evolution of society. I do not hold—but then neither, after the phase or event, do most of the users—that drugs are the best way, but that, for many in our society at the time, they were the only way.

*The Deep-grained Error at the Root*

All this may seem cold comfort even to those who watch from afar the horrors of the bodily-psychic diseases, the disintegration, diminution, addiction, destruction of self and others, that careless use of these powerful compounds brings with it. And to those close or involved, the horrors are almost sufficient to explain, though not to excuse, the hysteria in high places, the forceful, wrongly directed acts committed in badly aimed remedy in law. I agonize, probably, as much as any but the worst-placed victims. But I will give no one the comfort of confirming him in error, especially when the consequence of the error is the very victimization he deplors. The error is in the way we view the problem, and the connected problems, and, indeed, life; and that error is so deepgrained in our several beings and in our society's core enterprises and missions that something like a conversion experience or a long, laborious course of personal and social reconstruction is required for its eradication. We—at least the official and conventional we—are so sunk in our ignorance that we think we have nothing to learn from those who stumble in a different dark but at least seek and sometimes glimpse a different light.

What is called for is, I fear, unlikely to be forthcoming: a credible body of

elders or sages or adepts or wise men, manifesting in their lives that expanded and enlarged and heightened and deepened conscience and consciousness, reached by means other than substantial, and expressing itself in a way of being and acting that recommends itself on its face to the searcher, justly imbues him with trust, and begins and promises to continue to inspire him in a way that

he senses is fulfilling at once to himself and his mission, given his thus-to-be-discovered nature, in his thus-to-be-illuminated world.

No less than this will do us much good in the matter of drugs—or education, or parenting, or social policy, for that matter—and probably nothing less will permit us, or our culture or civilization, to survive at all.